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# **Cultural Consumption Through the Epistemologies of the South: 'Humanization' in Transnational Football Fan Solidarities**

## **Abstract**

In 2014, Boaventura de Sousa Santos awoke the global sociological community to the need to privilege 'humanization' in the exploration of transnational solidarities. In this article, we present the cultural consumption of a football club - Liverpool FC - to understand the common 'love', 'suffering', 'care' and 'knowledge' that fans who are part of the 'Brazil Reds' or 'Switzerland Reds' (although not all fans engaged in such communities are 'from' Brazil or Switzerland) experience. Our argument is that the global North lexicon of social class, ethnicity, gender and especially, nationality is less significant as starting points for analysis than humanization through shared love, which consolidates Liverpool FC fans' transnational solidarities. Accordingly, our article calls for the epistemologies of the global South to be used to understand the practices of cultural consumption that constitute activities in the sphere of everyday life, such as those involved in 'love' for a football club.

**Keywords:** humanization; epistemology; global South; love; football; transnational solidarity; cultural consumption

## **Introduction**

Sociological understandings of 'globalisation' are often contested, having multiple manifestations (Bauman, 1998; Robertson, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999; Turner and Khondker, 2010). A common thread found amongst different theorisations is an idea of hegemonic assimilation to Western thought (see Beck, 2000a; Elias, 2000 [1939]; or Ritzer, 2004). In other words, globalization as understood through an 'epistemology of the North' - unintentionally interpreted through patriarchal, capitalist, colonialist and oppressive lenses (Santos, 2014). An alternative way of understanding global, or transnational processes is to see them as balanced counter-hegemonic manifestations of cultural bricolages, each being interpreted and reinterpreted, made and remade amongst populations across the world who 'are not all headed to the same address, but [...] walk[ing] together for a very long time' (Santos, 2014: 2).

It is pertinent to ask which contexts best illustrate such bricolages of cultural processes in contemporary societies. In this article we suggest that the consumption of sport, and - in particular - association football (hereafter football) provides such a window. As Canclini (2004) posits, sport, and in particular football, provides necessary

clues for understanding how not only non-assimilation but also acceptance and integration in a range of societies could happen. Additionally, Beck (2010) argued that football could be considered a cultural phenomenon where relations of hegemonic assimilation and counter-hegemonic resistance can reconcile. The possible reconciliation is understood here as a politically charged ontological process of legitimization (see Rosa 2014, 2015), where distinct axis of being and becoming are sociologically acknowledged. Through looking at transnational patterns in the consumption of football matches, Giulianotti and Robertson (2006; 2007) gathered qualitative data from Scottish first and second generation British and Irish economic migrants in North America who were members of either Glasgow team, Rangers' and Celtic's, supporters' clubs. Using this data, Giulianotti and Robertson (2006; 2007) found that supporters' understandings had 'glocalized' in four different ways. First, supporters preserved their original cultural practices and meanings, thereby not reflecting the host culture; second – and alternatively - they may have accommodated or absorbed the practices and cultures of the host society; third, they may have mixed original and host cultures to produce hybridised social values and meanings and; fourth, some fans could have abandoned their original cultures in favour of those from their new surroundings. In fact, they found that in many cases, supporter cultures were contradictory in that they blended several of these seemingly oppositional values (Giulianotti and Robertson 2006: 135). Our focus relates to Giulianotti and Robertson's

(2006; 2007) but is distinct for two ways: first, our research participants do not lay an obvious family heritage to the city of the club they support, and second, while the glocalization thesis Giulianotti and Robertson (2004; 2006; 2007) advance focuses on ideas of hybridization, relativization, accommodation and transformation, we specifically turn our analysis to Santos' (2014) idea of 'humanization' and Mignolo's (2000) ideas of 'transculturation' and 'gnosis'. In doing so, we argue that the reconciliation between hegemonic assimilation and counter-hegemonic resistance does not take place under the modern, capitalist and colonial axes of socialisation, or the epistemic languages (Mignolo, 2009), of 'social class', 'gender', 'nationality' and 'ethnicity'. This article provides a counter-hegemonic perspective to discussions of 'normal' Western sociological imagination (see Beck, 2007) that strongly relied on the aforementioned social categories. We do not argue that such terms should be discarded from a sociological imagination that seeks to analyse transnational solidarities, but we follow Zizek (2008) and Santos (2014) in arguing that they served to divide under the capitalist colonial enterprise of the global North. In this sense, we argue against the particular universalism of European cosmopolitanism (see Robertson and Krossa, 2012; Santos, 2014) by advocating a provincial liberation cosmopolitanism (see Freire, 2005; Go, 2013; Kemple and Mawani, 2009), thus seeing the world through an epistemology of the global South that is expressed by a desire to transcend the dividing lines of 'North' and 'South' (Santos, 2014). We do this with a distinct reading of the case of

supporters of Liverpool Football Club (hereafter LFC). In this sense, we are not only overcoming a possible epistemicides (Santos, 2014) but also ontomicides and contexticides by exploring the humanization (being and becoming) of ontological global South individuals. To be sure, we follow Santos (2014) in seeing the South as those who fail to conform to the political and ideological dictums of contemporaneous colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist systems rather than a geographical space or territory. Moreover, we understand this South/North divide in a way that does not efface the geopolitical locality in which individuals are situated; nevertheless we follow Rosa (2014, 2015) in seeing the ones in the ontological South as indispensably required to constantly legitimize themselves. In this sense, to be physically situated in the economical North is not a circumstance that renders antithetic their ontological South position. Furthermore, our understanding of the global South goes beyond the subjectivity of humanization, stretching through the epistemologies of this humanization (Santos, 2014), but above all, seeks to highlight the apparent contexticide of the consumption of sport within mainstream sociological imagination. By turning to sport, and particularly football, to construct our arguments, we bring to the fore the apparent paradoxical praxis of mainstream sociology, where in one hand it goes into challenging hierarchical ways of knowing (see Santos, 2014; Smith, 1999), but on the other creates hierarchies in respect of contexts of knowing (Kemple and Mawani, 2009): sociological contexts become sites of hegemonic struggle that mimic the global North-

South relations. Questions about the authenticity of fandom are not questions about the injustices of poverty, law, religion or death but are injustices about life-world cultural consumptions that are subjectively important to those supporters we have researched. As such, they are injustices located in judgements about the practices of everyday-life (see *Sociology*'s special edition 'Sociologies of Everyday Life', 2015, 49(5)). Thus, if we are to propose a global South imagination to sociology, it becomes imperative that 'global South contexts' such as the consumption of sport, and in particular the English Premier League (hereafter EPL), be engaged with because of its pervasiveness on the 'everyday' level of many lives across the world: 2010/11 season saw 4.7bn across the world watch 'official' broadcasts of matches in its league (*Premier League* 2011).<sup>i</sup>

This article draws its arguments from an empirical research of football supporters in two 'places' - Brazil and Switzerland - interconnected through a third, Liverpool (UK). In this particular case Brazil and Switzerland vis-à-vis England are ontologically considered as global South by the challenge that those football supporters' practices impose on hegemonic forms of sociologically understanding 'authentic' fandom. Moreover, by relying on three distinct localities to draw our analysis, we highlight the possibilities that real and imaginary trans-border thinking provides to a subaltern sociological imagination (Mignolo, 2000). The data comes from an 18-months online and offline participant observation (Hine, 2009; Markham, 2013) of LFC supporters in

Brazil and Switzerland<sup>ii</sup>, and twenty in-depth interviews of supporters in Brazil. LFC supporters' Facebook groups - entitled 'Brazil Reds' and 'Switzerland Reds'<sup>iii</sup> were followed during this 18-month period (2013 to 2014), and face-to-face meetings were organised with Switzerland Reds' members in both Switzerland and Liverpool. Petersen-Wagner conducted in-depth interviews with Brazilian Reds through Facebook's 'chat' facility in Portuguese and participant observations with Switzerland Reds in which field interviews were conducted in French. Supporters in Brazil and Switzerland represented a range of demographic characteristics in terms of age, gender, social class, and geographical location.<sup>iv</sup>

### **The Consumption of Football and Methodological Nationalism/Imperialism Through the Epistemology of the North**

Ulrich Beck (2010) argues that methodological nationalism presents an idea of mono-culturalism and homogeneity formed within the political borders of nation-states, which define and guarantee the existence of societies (see Beck and Sznaider, 2006). Social researchers become 'stamp collector sociologists' exploring phenomena within and between nation-states (Beck, 2010). Methodological nationalism assumes differences between or similarities within mono-cultural and homogenous nation-states



(Beck, 2010). Beck's reliance on one form of nationalism to propose an epistemological turn to methodological cosmopolitanism can be credited to his understandings of the nation-state under an Eurocentric perspective (see Chernilo, 2007), or - viewed through the lens of Santos (2014) - an epistemology of the global North. Divisions and hierarchies of the global North served colonial-capitalist enterprises, by putting ethnic/colonial (see Bowen, 1996), gender/patriarchal (see Fanon, 1965), social class/capitalist (see McLellan, 2008) barriers which dehumanize struggles (Santos, 2014). If a methodological cosmopolitanism turn for the social sciences is sought, it needs to be necessarily post-colonial, in the sense that it opens multiple perspectives and gives voices to ontological global South individuals. The cosmopolitan turn also demands a re-assessment of what was theorised under a (nationalist)-North-centric perspective (see Beck, 2010; Santos, 2014). Above all, the cosmopolitan turn advocated here should be as Santos (2014: 42) pointed out emancipatory, circumventing a Northern-perspective that can be considered as inherently '...colonialist, imperialist, racist, and sexist'.

Despite Bourdieu's (1987) regret that mainstream sociologists had sidelined sport, sport supporters' cultures have contributed to theories including those of violence and 'deviance' (Dunning et al. 1998); racism (Back et al. 1999; Burdsey, 2006; Woodward, 2004), and homophobia (Cashmore and Cleland 2012; Dashper, 2012). Like in other

sociological fields, research in this area unintentionally hails from an epistemology of the North (Santos 2014). In the context of the cultural consumption of football, a North-centric perspective sees patriarchy (men), ethno-nationalism ('local' and white), and social class (working class) as bona fide for supporter 'authenticity', usually following the voices of the white, 'local' (although the boundaries of 'locality' are often elastic), (loosely defined-) 'working class' men who are the 'real fans' that take part in such research (see Millward, 2011: 58-75). Like the 'prison error of identity' (Beck, 2010: 25), individuals who do not conform to one of those characteristics are questioned until the dissonance is found, reinforcing essentialist notions of white, local, working class man as *the* 'authentic' supporter. These patterns in research stretch back multiple decades: in 1971, Taylor's account into the understanding of (the ill-defined notion of) 'football hooliganism' described it as the actions of a local, male, working class 'sub-cultural rump' of supporters who turned to 'violence' (described in a number of ways, from pitch invasions to physical encounters with opposing fans) as a means of reclaiming *their* game from 'commercial' forces that threatened to open football to other 'types' of fan. Although a useful set of research has since emerged that seeks to understand different forms of football fandom across the world (see Armstrong and Giulianotti, 2001, 2004; Ben-Porat, 2000; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006, 2007; Hognestad, 2000), the body of literature still largely defines supporters by their nationalities and/or countries of birth/residence rather than as simply 'supporters'.

In this article, we look at the practices and emotions of LFC supporters who are physically based in Switzerland or Brazil, and who would often be implied to be ontologically 'less authentic' because of their lack of 'local' attachment to Liverpool. Moreover, as aforementioned, those supporters were heterogeneously composed in terms of their ethnicity, gender, and social class, bringing an intercontextual aspect to their ontological legitimization practice. The EPL in which LFC compete would appear to be a case example of a global pseudo-imperialist football league (Hayton et al., 2015). Its football matches are broadcast in 212 countries across the world, and while recognising 'nationality' to be a 'liquid' concept (Bauman, 2000), its clubs recruit key athletic and coaching employees from multiple nations. At FIFA World Cup 2014, 110 out of 736 players who competed amongst the 32 nations were employed by EPL teams and at the start of 2015/16, 11 out of 20 EPL clubs' major shareholders hailed from countries other than the UK. Its clubs also attract unquantifiable numbers of fans from across the world - for instance in 2013, Manchester United commissioned Kanter to undertake research that found that it had 659m adult 'supporters', which is one in ten of the global population (Hayton et al., 2015) and LFC has just over 200 Official Supporters Clubs in over 50 different countries (*LFC*, n.d.). However, it is important not to assume that supporter practices from the UK pseudo-imperialize fan cultures from across these sites, as described by Giulianotti and Robertson (2006, 2007) Rather those

cultures should be interrogated but from the open position Santos (2014) affords in order to comprehend the transculturation processes (see Mignolo, 2000) those supporters incorporate into their politically charged ontological praxis in search of legitimization.

Therefore the research draws from the experiences of ontological global South supporters in search of legitimation, or at borders of (fan) 'authenticity' (Mignolo, 2000) based in what is understood as the geopolitical global North (Switzerland) or global South (Brazil). (see Santos, 2014), The empirical research with LFC supporters focuses on what Boff (2008) refers to as 'the ethics of human nature': the principle of care. Thus, their care towards LFC and other supporters is expressed by 'love', 'suffering' and 'shared knowledge'. The principle of care unites those ontological global South individuals in search of recognition, legitimization, and humanization. Above all, the principle of care provides grounds for our arguments that seek to defy the North-centric sociological imagination that recognises gender, ethnicity, and social class as the basis for transnational solidarities (see Beck, 2000b).

### **'Authentic' Love for a Football Club**

While undertaking the fieldwork at LFC's Anfield home stadium with Switzerland Reds, Petersen-Wagner was told by one of its members Nora<sup>v</sup> that, on that day, the stadium lacked its usual 'authentic' atmosphere, rendering it not to be 'a particularly good experience'. She did not immediately elaborate upon what she meant, but upon further questioning said that chanting was less prominent and loud than it had been in the past, attributing this to the large presence of what she called 'tourist fans' who diluted this 'authenticity'. In Millward's (2012) research, 'traditional' fans who give rise to 'authentic' experiences at LFC were premised on large volumes of supporters perceived to be male, 'local' to Liverpool and assumed to be 'working class' (for a distinct class definition in the UK see Savage et al, 2013). As such, the affirmation from Nora caused an initial surprise to Petersen-Wagner, but when the conversation unfolded it became clear that Nora did not use gender, ethnicity, social class, and especially locality as her reference points, instead basing her understanding of 'authentic' fandom on a strong connection to what she saw to be LFC's 'culture'. Indeed, she saw its 'culture' to be an understanding of the club's history, and those fans who are not in possession of it as holding a transient passion. As such, 'authenticity' for Nora was not hindered by trans-border corporeal mobility. This idea of shared love was also present in the interviews with Brazil Reds' members, as it is possible to see from the quote below.

“There is no distinction [talking about authenticity]. Supporter is a supporter. Here [in Brazil], in Liverpool, or in Thailand. We are in the same category, that unites us in behalf of a love for the club.” (Christian)

Christian highlights not only the unifying aspect of love that grants or denies authenticity, but above all reveal that the nation-state borders still can be regarded as possible reasons for hindering solidarities. Nonetheless, as Christian emphasises, those borders can be transcended by notions of shared love and devotion that take place in multiple regions. It is also interesting how Christian not only relates his presence in Brazil vis-à-vis Liverpool, but also incorporates another locality to highlight the fact that others in the same situation are 'accepted' as 'authentic supporters'. Inadvertently, Christian challenges a customary notion within the imperial and colonial enterprise that created hierarchies between the metropolis and the periphery (Said, 1994). Thus, Christian unintentionally connects two geopolitical South localities (Brazil and Thailand) to question if there would be a metropolis (Liverpool), where authenticity would be naturalized. In relation to Scandinavian LFC supporters, Nash (2000) has found similar attitudes to the way nation-state borders could initially hinder solidarities but are transcended by the mutual love physically distant supporters have towards LFC. Similarly, fellow Brazil Reds Luis reported how not only locality, but also ethnicity

needs to be transcended to avoid the type of cultural harm naturalized notions of what means to be an 'authentic' supporter can generate:

“There is no supporter per region, we have lots of Liverpool supporters in Pakistan. What distinct us is just a geographical barrier, but we are all one sole organism that flourished through love in different and distant places. That is the magic of Liverpool, where one Black, one Latino, one Anglo-Saxon can feel the same thing. Practically a ‘monogenism’ in relation to Liverpool. We come from the same group, we are just in different places.”  
(Luis)

Luis’ arguments in relation to how authenticity can be granted emphasise an idea of shared love that flourishes in different time and space. Above all, Luis implies that ethno-national barriers against socialisations and mutual understandings do not hinder 'love' for LFC. It is interesting to highlight that Luis describes this common bond as ‘practically a monogenism’. Unintentionally, Luis, like Christian, follows Said (1994) in questioning the divisions 'race' puts in place over other humanizing bonds. According to Luis' remarks, different LFC supporters would all come from a same internal puissance that originated from love, bestowing them with a general humanity. Those loving acts in supporters’ discourses are accompanied by moments of suffering that re-

energise their sense of belonging to a group that transcends the aforementioned dividing forces. As seen in the below quotes from André and Beto (both Brazil Reds' members) for them to enjoy this humanizing puissance they have in the first place to endure physical and emotional trials.

“It was like an odyssey. I even skipped classes and work just to watch games [...] When things are difficult we get more attached to them.” (André)

“Mate, it was all by chance. I went to the shopping mall with my fiancée to watch the game and then go to the movies. The place is like a pub, well, it tries to resemble an English pub, and I was there having some pints. And out of a sudden a guy shows up wearing all the [LFC] kit with a 1970s top. My reaction was: ‘ahh, that miserable, I hope he at least know what he is wearing’. My surprise came after he asked if [Jamie] Carragher [an important player for LFC supporters] was going to play. Was like love at the first sight. We watched the game together, and after suffering together, we celebrated together.” (Beto)

Here, 'love' emerges from shared endured difficulties. The recognition of being an 'authentic' supporter is bestowed by this love, an emotion which defines 'humanization'



(Santos, 2014). As such, 'learning to love' as a precondition to love will be discussed in length in the following section.

## **Learning to Love**

Across the research, supporters talked about the emotion of 'loving' a football club emerging from not only the jubilation of team victories (especially when LFC wins trophies) but, most notably, through 'suffering' on moments of poor team results or playing form. During one participant observation with Switzerland Reds after a game in Liverpool a conversation with Nora, her partner Quincy, and Fabienne developed around how they kept informed with the latest LFC news. Nora explained that she used to rely on Swiss media, but that the reports were quite sparse. On the other hand, one of the main media she used to get information was BBC (BBC1 and BBC2 are broadcast in Switzerland), especially from Match of the Day (a television show where all the fixtures of the weekend are commentated upon). Her main point for getting information about LFC from the BBC was not only that it provided the 'most accurate analysis' but especially because she could use the show to improve her English language capabilities. Nora in different occasions acted as the spokesperson for the group, particularly in situations when they engaged in conversations with individuals in Liverpool who could only speak in English. Learning English as a precondition for 'authentically' learning to

love LFC, also reported by Farred (2002) in his autobiographical research on loving LFC in South Africa, emerged as well as a theme amongst Brazil Reds' interviews, as Beto testifies:

“I always loved the English language. But I was never a good speaker. I am from a working class family, got my first computer when I got my first job, and you can imagine how hard is to live a Europeanisation like this [...] In the beginning [...] I had to satisfy myself with the Brazilian media. But with time I started learning English and started reading the media from the club's land [...] but now, like 5 to 6 years [afterwards] I read frequently them [English media]. Nowadays I do not read anything else about the club in Portuguese.” (Beto)

Beto also highlights the barriers he had to overcome to follow LFC through the media (no computer, and needing to learn English). Yet, irrespective of the determination many supporters around the world show in following an EPL club, the ones that principally come through media engagement are viewed as less 'authentic' in many sociological analyses (see Millward, 2011). Little is given to the common emotions - individually experienced and collectively communicated - by such marginalised fans across the world. As discussed in the previous section, there is a

general sense amongst those different supporters of ontologically legitimizing themselves on others' eyes through endured trials. This necessity to learn appeared once more when Diogo, the voluntary administrator of Brazil Reds' Facebook group, shared a post about LFC's star player, Luis Suarez's life that was written in English. Diogo who had strong English language capabilities, felt he had a moral duty to read and learn about Suarez's life and how this impacted Suarez acts and performance on the pitch.<sup>vi</sup> Further Diogo argued that those in the group who could read English should précis the article for those who cannot. Language should not obscure fandom, with linguistic knowledge translating into moral obligation to learn and teach. As seen in the below quotes from Beto and Guilherme (both Brazil Reds' members), learning to become a LFC supporter for those distant individuals differed from more 'natural' forms (see Hornby, 1992) by its non-linearity and necessity of actively looking for information.

"With Flamengo I was conditioned as basically all kids in Brazil are. With Liverpool I had to learn in a non-linear fashion, looking for things I wanted to know on that specific time." (Beto)

"The big difference between following a team from abroad is that in England the history and stories are naturally transmitted, and as I live in

Brazil, it [LFC's history] does not show in the media, so the supporter needs to look for info." (Guilherme)

Accordingly, the Facebook groups for both Switzerland and Brazil Reds became repositories of shared knowledge where the more educated ones had a duty of care to others in respect of passing their acquired wisdom. In one respect, the individual with the acquired 'original source' wisdom, as with the aforementioned cases, is conferred a higher authentic status amongst the two different groups. The ability to understand what is said and written about LFC in its native language (English) becomes paramount for those supporters in a way of allowing them to engage in conversations with 'native' supporters. Carla set up a 'WhatsApp' group for a network of supporters in which some were based in Belo Horizonte (Brazil).<sup>vii</sup> She did this so that knowledge about LFC could be exchanged between people who were physically distant. The sharing of information cemented bonds within the group, which grew in size and physical location. The 'Whatsapp' mediated group was not defined by nation-state borders but by 'love'. This can be better seen in the below quote from Luis, when he describes how he used to learn about LFC with the help of a 'gringo'.

"The fundamental point for me was when I got really on Internet in 2004/2005. So I started studying the team. Learning about it. I got loads of

international magazines from a friend I made [through the Internet] in England. A gringo liked me at the time, and sent me lots of Liverpool magazines.” (Luis)

Sharing knowledge is a way for those physically distant individuals to build transnational solidarities that repudiate nation-state borders and gender (see quote below). A number of Brazil Reds recommended that Marila be interviewed as she was described as highly knowledgeable about LFC. As earlier argued, the literature on football fandom sees 'authentic' supporters being described as a homogenous group of white, working class and local men, and thus by emphasising Marilia's knowledge supporters were challenging the false notion that women could not be 'real' supporters (see Pope, 2011).

“Marilia, for instance, she defends [LFC player Jordan] Henderson all the time [...] Marilia knows a lot about football. On another Facebook group, myself, her, Igor, Beto and Arnon always defend Henderson.” (Bernardo)

In sum, knowledge provides individuals with the ability to liberate themselves from oppressive forces that hold them separately within imperial axes of solidarities (Santos

2014). Moreover, knowledge becomes a unifying puissance for those different individuals in claiming and sustaining authenticity.

## **Discussion**

Santos (2014) argues that a precondition for North-South divides that splinters transnational solidarities and 'humanity' is the way in which 'the North' speaks about 'the South'. Effectively, the global North epistemology (often unintentionally) silences 'the other' (see Spivak, 1988) by constructing him or her as essentially different (see Said, 1994). For a true epistemology of the South to emerge, the ontological South experiences, being they in the geopolitical North or South, must be heard. The global North hegemonic sociological tradition silences those individuals by acting as ventriloquist for ontological South speakers (Santos, 2014). Santos (2014) calls for voice to be given to the unheard and humiliated, irrespective of global position. For us, ventriloquism resides not only in global North sociologists speaking for global South individuals (context), but especially in ways of how global North sociologists speak and understand global South conditions (epistemic languages). By privileging analysis through global North epistemic language (i.e. the one that focuses on ethnicity, social class, gender, nationality) the conclusion is to silence the "[...] only ones who know, from experience, that there are two sides to the line, the only ones who know how to

imagine what they do not live" (Santos, 2014: 8). For a true epistemology of the South to emerge, it is necessary to match the experiences of the South (context) with languages of the South (epistemology).

Our argument is that the processes of common humanization - love, care, suffering and knowledge - should be privileged in the analysis of transnational solidarities. The common cultural consumption of sport, and the shared emotions felt by spatially dispersed individuals, is a good locus to explore this. As our data show, Brazil and Switzerland Reds described their relationship towards LFC as one of 'love'. Love humanizes transnational solidarities by overlooking the colonial capitalist axis of socialisation (i.e. social class, gender, ethno-nationality) and emphasizes the shared affection that are created and fostered. As argued by Boff (2008), 'love' can be understood through the myth of Saturn's carnivalesque celebration (the Saturnalia), a moment where distinctions vis-à-vis social classes were erased and individuals became equals in their quest for integration. As Finn and Giulianotti (1998) point out, football can be a key site in the 'real' world for understanding carnivalesque festivals and provide a platform for mutual understanding amongst individuals who might seem à priori distinct. Supporters in both Brazil and Switzerland emphasized that social classes, ethnicity, gender or nationality did not prevent their common socialization. Moreover, as posited by Boff (2008) and Boff and Boff (1987), care presupposes a dual sentiment

with love - suffering. Instead of being a dualistic sentiment, suffering should be understood in the context of *being* and *falling* 'in love'. Supporters not only build their transnational solidarities in respect of the love they shared, but emphasised the suffering of following LFC. This empathy of suffering united those distinct individuals around a communal and mutual horizontal way of being (see Boff, 2008). Love as a sentiment that inherently endures suffering can be better understood by Meister Eckhart's (2013) notion of detachment. Eckhart von Hochheim was a Dominican theologian during 14th century Europe who came into prominence during the Avignon Papacy but later on was trialled as a heretic and disappeared without leaving any trails (see introduction in Eckhart, 2013). Eckhart's (2013) central argument is that 'true love' presupposes a complete detachment from the sensorial experiences, where individuals would disregard aspects outside of them in their search for transcendence. This sensorial detachment can be interpreted as an avoidance of understanding solidarities through sociological categories that create divisions. Gender, social class, ethnicity and nationality served to divide under the colonial and capitalist enterprise, but as Eckhart (2013) argues to reach mutual understanding individuals would have to strip of their external and material being. As LFC supporters reported, for them to build solidarities with others they had to strip of their positions in a quest for finding internal qualities which all of them possessed: love and suffering. Therefore, what reconciled those distant individuals through transnational solidarities is not external or reified sociological categories, but



internal and metaphysical. Thus, love, caring and sharing knowledge with others, become central conditions for 'humanization'.

Nevertheless, supporters still had to overcome the marginalized positions the reified sociological categories presented to them. Categories that even supporters of Liverpool and other clubs in the UK report: 'real' fans are likely to be considered as male, white, 'working class' and local to the club (see Millward, 2011; 2012; Pope, 2011). Knowledge can become a tool of empowerment in the humanizing struggle against 'artificial' dividing forces. Freire's (2005) pedagogy of the oppressed can provide the necessary language to understand how those individuals used knowledge to foster transnational solidarities. Knowledge not only provides ontological and epistemic languages for overcoming marginalization, it also, as Freire (2005) argues, contributes in equipping those individuals with necessary tools to transform how they understand their position. The position those individuals occupy in the world is only understood through conscientização (Freire, 2005), a continuous process where they finally become aware of the causes of their marginalisation. For Freire (2005), individuals through conscientização are able to 'name the world', in essence for them to change the world initially they need to understand their position and then engage in dialogue. As shown previously, when LFC supporters emphasised the reified sociological categories to demonstrate how their solidarities are authentic, they engaged in 'naming the world'.

This occurs because they consciously understood that those sociological categories served to divide them in their struggle for recognition. When they mention ethnicity, social classes, and gender they are 'naming the world' and by seeking to overcome those dividing categories, they are above all also liberating the oppressor. When the Anglo-Saxon Liverpoolian is inserted in their discourses, they are redeeming these individuals from their oppressive history by re-humanizing them through solidarity. As Freire (2005) argues, humanization through knowledge can just happen when individuals engage in 'true dialogue' that fosters fellowship. In this sense, when LFC supporters were sharing knowledge through Facebook, or engaging in conversations through Whatsapp, they are taking part in dialogue that unites them. Freire (2005) points out that such dialogue may promote a horizontal fellowship where all have something important to add in the creation of solutions to their common struggle for recognition. This can just happen through a sense of love and care where individuals feel compassion towards others' sufferings (Freire, 2005). What is important in Freire's (2005) pedagogy is that solutions that emerge from the oppressed inherently seek to overcome the epistemic and ontological language of the oppressor. LFC supporters when emphasizing knowledge, love and suffering as unifying (and humanizing) characteristics of their authentic fandom were (perhaps sub-consciously) overcoming the language that was used to divide and create hierarchies. This takes place as they consciously see the nation-state, ethnicity, and gender as categories

oppressors would rely on to 'authenticate' fandom. By employing knowledge, suffering and love they end by proposing an emancipatory solution to their common problem: to be recognized as 'authentic' supporters.

How do love, suffering and knowledge provide a distinct language to reconcile globalization's hegemonic assimilation and counter-hegemonic struggle? Our argument is that this epistemic and ontological vocabulary serves as the ground for understanding transnational solidarities, and we further argue that those solidarities are the basis for imagining globalization under a provincial cosmopolitan sociology. Moreover, those transnational solidarities challenge the very notion of 'trans-nationalism' by avoiding and transcending the nation-state as a dividing category. Globalization as argued by Robertson (1995) presupposes a time-space compression, but even that the outcome of this compression leads to glocalization (Robertson, 1995) or hybridisation (Canclini, 1995), both examples of counter-hegemonic manifestations, space, under this sociological imagination, still takes into consideration a vocabulary that served to divide (i.e. nation-state, ethnicity). Thus any solidarity that might emerge from this epistemic language is bound for disunion. Two examples of possible ruptures to this aforementioned sociological tradition are found in Castells' (2012) *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, and Beck and Grande's (2008) *Cosmopolitan Europe*. First, for Castells (2012) a network of counterpower activists is developing around the world. These

networks are not hemmed in by any nation-state but adjoined through, principally, shared interests and concerns but these new amalgamations are afforded through the architecture of social media technologies. Networked communities of individuals and organizations join up across the world and express their shared emotions. As their communication deepens, their senses of (subjective) injustices are replaced by a hope for a (subjectively defined) 'better' world order. As such, emotions are shared across the world. Second, Beck and Grande (2008) argue that European cosmopolitanisation is largely understood on a vertical orientation that presupposes the amalgamation of supranational political and economic structures. On the other hand, the horizontal cosmopolitanisation of individuals and societies to a large extent is ignored because sociologists tend to see Europe and the European Union as institutional projects that leave intact the nation-state. Nevertheless, when analysing those horizontal amalgamations, Beck and Grande (2008) show how Europeanization can be understood as a process that seek to overcome hatred and belligerence, and to become a space for mutual understanding through shared multilingualism. In this sense, space should be sociologically conceived as an imaginary region where love, suffering and knowledge act as unifying puissances. As such, when imagining compression of space under this new vocabulary it is possible to envision stronger solidarities that endeavour humanization. On the other hand, transnational solidarities based on the hegemonic vocabulary only provide weak answers to strong questions (Santos, 2014). If what is

sought are strong answers it is essential that a stronger unifying vocabulary is used. Accordingly, what we propose is that globalization should be imagined as an integrated 'compression' of oppressed individuals in their common path for liberation. Individual group struggles by women, ethnic and religious minorities, workers, economic migrants, and refugees, before a unifying vocabulary is imagined, would be threatened with disjuncture based on the differences that the colonial capitalist language presupposes. 'Globalization' entails the unification of those individual struggles in one compressed movement that seeks to humanize both different oppressed movements and their oppressors. Globalization, thus, does not only relate to the intensification of the movement of goods, images and people around the globe (see Urry, 2000) but closer to a cosmopolitan ideal means the conscientização of individuals of their position in the world.

## **Conclusion**

'Globalization' involves transnational connection between people, places, images or capital (Bauman, 1998). A problem faced by the sociologies of globalization is that dominant voices within the discipline tend to sub-consciously begin their analysis with the 'normal' epistemology and language of the global North (see Goody, 2006). As such, basic understandings are rooted within hegemonic assimilations to 'Western' ideas.

Santos (2014) opens our senses to this - awakening us to the need to place humanization over and above the global North sociological language of social class, gender, ethnicity and nationality, which may be socially-constructed products of the societies from which they emerge. To be clear, this does not automatically involve discarding such notions but it does involve problematizing those distinct 'ways of knowing' in a truly cosmopolitan way.

As Amsler (2015: 1) reminds us, Santos' (2014) *Epistemologies of the South* presents an 'invitation to break from the hegemonic knowledges that still underpin global abjection today, and offers an epistemological and ethical framework for a new 'insurgent' sociological imagination'. The question is what that imagination should explore. We argue that the consumption of sport, and specifically support for a football club provides a key site to engage with a sociological imagination that emerges from an epistemology of the South. We presented this case for two reasons: first, as Bauman (1998) argues, in liquid societies the turn to consumption, and specifically how individuals 'feel' about consumer acts can be a way of understanding 'globalization', and, second, the global spread of fandom and consumer practices around the EPL, and as in the case of LFC, magnifies the liquidity phenomena. Yet, the consumption of sport has largely lay in a marginal position in the 'sociology of the global North' although the acts of fans can unite individuals across the world, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or where they

live/born. This is not to pretend that social divisions do not exist in support for a football club: match attendance data suggests structural barriers of exclusion may exist that make it difficult for women, and people from some ethnicities to attend matches, and this is reflected in the sociological literature that paints 'traditional' or 'authentic' fans as 'local', white, 'working class', men (Millward, 2011). But this somewhat misses our point: supporting a football club comes in different forms and yet, despite these differences men and women, that are not defined by ethnicity, social class or nation-state all engage in shared emotions - joy in victory, sadness in defeat. In other words, we answer Beck (2000b) on how solidarity amongst strangers can be made possible: those individuals would only be strangers while the epistemology of the global North is preferred.

As such, the consumption of football affords an opportunity to explore an epistemology of humanization that does not absolutely reject the global North's lexicon but does not over privilege it. Underplaying the unifying role of care through love and emphasizing the 'normal' epistemology of the global North provides only, in Santos' (2014) terms, weak answers to strong questions. What we sought was to provide strong answers to strong questions. The strong question in question is how transnational solidarity emerges and sustains. The strong answer is based on a distinct epistemic vocabulary, in which our distinct context (consumption of football) shows how it operates in everyday

life: emotions are more shared through humanity than locations, gender, ethnicity or social class.

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<sup>i</sup> These figures do not take into account 'pirated' streams and other unofficial broadcasts.

<sup>ii</sup> A total of 27 supporters between Switzerland Reds and Brazil Reds can be considered as main participants. Petersen-Wagner had contact with over 25 different Switzerland Reds' members during participant observations in Switzerland and Liverpool.

<sup>iii</sup> Both Facebook group names have been changed to uphold participants' rights to confidentiality.

<sup>iv</sup> Demographic data was not directly collected during participant observations or interviews, but social class, educational background, and geographical location emerged during those data gathering processes. Switzerland Reds' supporters came primarily from French-speaking Cantons, hold professional jobs and were in their mid-30s to mid-40s. Brazil Reds came primarily from capitals of different Brazilian States (ranging from the South in Porto Alegre to the Northeast in Fortaleza - 3200km distant on a straight line), were in their mid-20s to mid-30s, and were in their majority university students.

<sup>v</sup> All names have been changed to uphold participants' rights to confidentiality.

<sup>vi</sup> During that season Suarez was banned for 8 games for biting an opponent.

<sup>vii</sup> WhatsApp is an instant messaging app for smartphones.

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